Governor John Kasich and members of the 129th Ohio General Assembly got off to a fast start...with three major objectives: re-staffing a state bureaucracy, establishing a growth agenda, and confronting an $8 billion budget deficit. All departments of state government now have new permanent or interim directors; union power is being reduced; and via Governor Kasich’s Budget proposal, local governments would be given new tools to lower costs. Following is a summary of legislative activities of interest to Ohio architects:

OSFC on a New Course
In the space of 15 minutes during February, the Ohio School Facilities Commission (OSFC) reversed four years of Democratic leadership, restoring former Taft appointee Richard Hickman Jr. as commission director and rescinding guidelines that were a centerpiece of the Strickland administration’s OSFC policy that included Project Labor Agreements (PLA), and other concessions to organized labor. The Ohio House of Representatives is hearing a bill, HB 102, which would prohibit state agencies from requiring or prohibiting certain labor requirements as a condition of performing public works and prohibit appropriations of state funds for public works when political subdivisions require labor requirements.

AIA-Ohio Endorsed Beougher and an Architect-led SAO
Former executive director of the State Architect’s Office (SAO), Craig Weise, AIA, has been replaced by Interim Director, Lane Beougher, AIA. On February 27, AIA-Ohio thanked Director of Administrative Services (DAS), Robert Blair for that appointment and encouraged him to appoint an architect with Lane’s qualifications to the permanent position. SAO’s future direction is unclear, along with its recent BIM proposal.

Flowers Named State Fire Marshal
Former Rep. Larry Flowers, a Canal Winchester Republican, has been named state fire marshal and will begin serving in the new position April 4.

Term limits forced Flowers from the House in 2008. Prior to his legislative career, he was fire chief for the Madison Township Fire Department in Franklin County from 1978 to 2000 and has recently been serving as Madison Township administrator.

AIA-Ohio asks Kasich to Pursue a Capital Bill
Citing the state’s critical financial condition, House Speaker, Bill Batchelder, and Senate President, Tom Niehaus, have said there would be no Capital Bill this year. However in recent days, legislators have used the Transportation Bill to fund some ongoing capital construction projects (road, bridge, water supply, wastewater, solid waste and storm water improvements that have been agreed to, but not yet funded due to the lack of a Capital Bill) and, depending upon how Budget Bill discussions go, a few critical local projects might be included in a fall Capital Bill.

On February 21 AIA-Ohio called upon Governor Kasich to move forward with a Capital Bill “to fund bricks-and-mortar projects across our state that will spur quick job growth.”

AIA-Ohio President, Steve Shinn, AIA, advised Kasich that “since 2008, the number of workers in the national architectural industry has dropped by 24%. According to the Dayton Business Journal, construction jobs in Ohio have dropped 18% since 2006. We believe your initial focus should be on job creation for Ohio to pull our state out of this great recession.”

He pointed out that “an annual $1 billion investment in construction produces an estimated 600 direct jobs for architects and engineers.” According to the Dayton Business Journal, “A $1 billion investment in nonresidential projects produces an estimated 9,700 direct construction jobs and another 4,600 indirect jobs for companies that serve the industry.”
Shinn said “concentrating construction dollars on renovation is a wise investment in job creation. Rehabilitation generally uses about 20% more labor and, in turn, produces a greater number of jobs than new construction. Jobs are higher skilled that pay better. The jobs are local and cannot be outsourced as well. Renovations invest more dollars in the local communities and benefit real estate companies, lending institutions, service vendors and restaurants more than new construction. We encourage a continued focus on rehabilitation projects.”

**The Future of Construction Reform**

Additional construction reform has taken a back seat to legislation curtailing unions and laying the groundwork for a budget bill. However, Governor Kasich’s Budget Bill would enable the use of single prime contracts for both local and state projects and raise the prevailing wage threshold from $78,000 to $5 million.

**Department of Development Reorganized**

The Ohio Department of Development has been partially privatized to encourage existing businesses to stay in Ohio and new businesses to come to Ohio. The goal is more jobs for Ohioans, many of whom would be architects.

**Tax Incentives Could Increase Architect Jobs**

A number of bills have been introduced that would provide tax credits for a variety of business development projects that would increase architectural opportunities -- like cleaning up Brownfields (HB10) and encouraging businesses to move into currently vacant buildings (HB18).

**AIA-Ohio Urges Building Code Update**

At the urging of the Ohio Homebuilder’s Association, the Board of Building Standards withdrew from the Joint Committee on Agency Rule Review (JCARR) February agenda proposed changes to the Ohio Building, Mechanical, and Plumbing codes. The changes are based on the 2009 International Building Codes developed by the International Code Council. Ohio’s current code is based on the dated 2006 IBC last updated in July of 2007.

On Feb. 21 AIA-Ohio sent JCARR members and legislative leaders a letter urging adoption of the revisions. President Steve Shinn said, “We need to regularly review and update our building codes to ensure they are based on the most up to date advances in construction technology and current scientific and technical data.”

He told legislators “in 2010, the proposed changes underwent a thorough review which yielded a neutral cost-impact analysis. The review was conducted by a comprehensive group of Ohio Board of Building Standards (BBS) members and staff, stakeholders, and constituents, including the homebuilders’ association.” The adoption of these codes is critical to the State in fulfilling its obligations under the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act.

During its March 7 meeting JCARR approved new AIA-Ohio endorsed commercial standards under the International Building Code (IBC).